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Poems

by

o Aneurin Williams

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POEMS



POEMS

BY

IOLO ANEURIN WILLIAMS

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PR

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TO
THE MEMORY
OF
MATTHEW PRIOR

941331

NOTE

To the editors of *The Westminster Gazette*, *Country Life*, *The New Statesman*, *The British Review*, *The Blue Review*, *The New Age*, *The Cambridge Review*, *Cambridge Poets*, and the old *Poetry Review*, the author is indebted for kind permission to reprint certain of these poems.

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Poems

From a Flemish Graveyard

(*January 1915*)

A YEAR hence may the grass that waves
O'er English men in Flemish graves,
Coating this clay with green of peace
And softness of a year's increase,
Be kind and lithe as English grass
To bend and nod as the winds pass ;
It was for grass on English hills
These bore too soon the last of ills.

And may the wind be brisk and clean,
And singing cheerfully between
The bents a pleasant-burdened song
To cheer these English dead along ;

12 From a Flemish Graveyard

For English songs and English winds
Are they that bred these English minds.

And may the circumstantial trees
Dip, for these dead ones, in the breeze,
And make for them their silver play
Of spangled boughs each shiny day.

Thus may these look above, and see
And hear the wind in grass and tree,
And watch a lark in heaven stand,
And think themselves in their own land.

In Memoriam F.

THOU art dead ; there is no more
Of chatting by the open door,
Of theorising in the fields
Shaming the crop with wisdom's yields,
Or talking by the study fire
Planning jests and heart's-desire.
Thou art dead ; of these and thee
There is no more but memory.

Twenty-Five

(*In Camp. June 1915*)

X
WHEN Beauty's spirit dwells among
The hills, and dowers grass and tree
Each as the poised phrase of a song,
A jewel's separate entity ;

Then—Feast my eyes upon them there,
The shapely hill, the grass, the tree :
There may not be a sight so fair,
When June brings twenty-six to me.

“When we are Old, are Old . . .”

AGE is a large, untidy hall
With a little fire and a draughty door,
Where the great beginnings of nothing-at-all
Hobnob on the littered floor.

And they chatter over the rags, the old,
With “This was a flaming kiss,”
Or, “Men would dream were this thing told,
And men would weep were this.”

And thither shall you and I come, too,
And walk in the chilly place;
And I shall still be praising you,
Though the young men laugh in my face.

16 “When we are Old, are Old . . .”

And the broken words of the once sweet tongue

Shall feel about in the gloom,

And echoes of all that we said when young

Go racketing round the room.

A Monument

(After an Ancient Fashion)

TRAVELLER, turn a mournful eye
Where my lady's ashes lie;
If thou hast a sweet thine own
Pity me, that am alone ;—
Yet, if thou no lover be,
Nor hast been, I'll pity thee.

At Music

TO and fro, and out and back
The music swings me, lying slack
And limp and tired; and now it's day,
And now it's night, and I'm away
With queer inconsequential things,
While still the music swings and swings.
I hardly listen to the sound
Which yet slips in and laps around
Work-sodden brain and listless sense . . .
"An ecstasy for eighteenpence"
I think—and then I wonder why
I thought of that. Perhaps I try
To listen, and I watch the flies
Dancing about the light, till eyes
Grow dazed and numb. . . . Then suddenly
The music grips me, thrills to me

With little shudders up my flesh,
Like sunsparks where the wind is fresh,
That scatter out across a lake,
When day is new and just awake.

Testimony

I CANNOT shake the sullen air
With reasons wherefore thou art fair ;
I cannot move the listless trees
With proofs of all thy subtleties ;
Nor can I make less obdurate
The waters to thy splendid state.
And yet the air and trees and sea
Make fervent witnessing for thee,
And constant testimony bear
Of reasons wherefore thou art fair.

Faustus Junior

X
SO then, for Helen. And I conjured her,
In weaving spells from many a conjurer—
Albertus and Agrippa—with her name.
And twitched. And gave my spirit. And she
came.

Oh, long before these eyes could see her face
I thought her rumour battled through all space
And glowed the gaping world. Oh, tediously
Her form grew through the dark, and slowly
more

Clearly she loomed. Full proud she was that
bore

Her conquering beauty's crowning certainty.
And she was joyful to be called again
To stir the hearts and shake the limbs of men.

I reached my arms to meet her as she neared.
Then sudden knowledge that I'd never feared,
Not guessed, rushed in. And Helen all the while
Came slowly towards me with her Grecian smile.
But now I knew that for my heart that day
Her beauty had no call, was dowdy, grey,
Old-fashioned. Then I choked, and could not
speak,
And charmed her back to cheer some ghostly
Greek.

Lines to a Potential Sweetheart

I WISH I were in love with you,
My dear, for it's a pity
To miss one's opportunities
With one so sweet and witty.

But Fancy is a stubborn dame,
Not ruled by mind or eye ;
I, strangely, do not fancy you,
And so, my dear, good-bye.

La Vecchia

(To Walter Sickert, for his drawing)

I THINK that that sad look of yours to-day—
That dreamy gazing at the distances,
Which keeps you standing rapt and motionless
In that near present of the far away—
Is full of memories and interplay
Of thoughts of many days of happiness
When you were swift to dance and bright of tress,
That now are heavy-limbed and old and grey.

Perhaps it is the chatting of the birds
In the new sun that brings to you again
The thought that on a day just such as this
You should have seen him come, have heard his
words,
Have felt——. No. Only guessing at your pain
I watch you gaze upon your memories.

XX

A Ballad

I HAD a wish to make a song
Out of a thought that lurked behind
A stifling drapery which hung
Stuffily about my mind.

Therefore I went where the wind blew
And gently stirred around the trees,
And birds sang, and the bold sunlight
Scattered the dust upon the breeze.

“For here,” I said, “will wave-like life
Break with its pulse the deadening
Oppression of those greasy clouts
That choke my thought, and I will sing.”

The birds sang, and the grasses moved
And rustled, and the insects spoke;
Yet no sound seemed to stir my thought
That lay behind its heavy cloak ;

Save once or so, perhaps, some note
Far-pitched of supreme happiness
That came half-heard upon the wind
Would steal beneath, or lightly press

The curtain on my brain, and then
The thought would start and momentarily
Throb into action—yet again
Subside inertly, hopelessly.

But still I grappled with myself,
Striving to hold my mind well out
Where all the sound and all the wind
Might play with it, and shake about

Those curtains that were muffling me.

Yet there the draperies would remain
As mental cerecloths, while beneath
Some bloodless tick fed on my brain.

Then dropped the wind, the bird-tunes ceased,
The insects hushed, drab evening's shade
Fell; and I reached my door again
With murdered thought and song unmade.

The Don and the Aeroplane

(An University Fable)

*A don went up in an aeroplane ;
He never seemed quite the same again.*

THE engine quivered, throbbed and roared,
The noise of the screw crashed through
his brain,
And the wind tore through him as up he
soared
And swept through the sky in the aeroplane.

He rose over Cambridge and looked deep down
On the chequered place of green and grey ,
And wondered the little space he had flown
Should carry his heart so far away.

The Don and the Aeroplane 29

For he saw in those seconds of pulsing speed,
Since he left the earth on his iron wings,
That his life was a mere mechanic greed
For tinkering with the bolts of things.

Conceiving not—let alone bringing to birth—
A new idea, a grand world plan,
But work for the journeymen of earth
To do as bid by some master-man.

So he said to himself as he whizzed through the
air

And saw life sharp for the first clear time,
“Oh the wind will make a man wise and fair
And wind-taught I will speak this rhyme:

“I do not care a single jot
If men learn Greek or men do not;
I do not mind what problems bristle
About the most obscure epistle;

30 The Don and the Aeroplane

I will not wail, or raise a pæan
Over compulsory Chaldean ;
I will not go to college chapel,
Dispute that Eve devoured the apple,
Dissect another arthropod,
Ever again. So help me God."

Then down he came in the aeroplane
And they landed safe with a graceful dip ;
And he met his fellow dons again,
Who asked him how he enjoyed his trip.

But slipping away he seemed to shirk
Meeting their petty-questioning eyes,
And he made an end of his journeymen-work—
Burning his books to the town's surprise !

Yet he never conceived, for all that hour,
A plan to better the world a button ;
For the wind had given him sight, not power,
And, when he died, he was soon forgotten.

The Don and the Aeroplane 31

*So that is the tale of the aeroplane,
And the don that was never the same again,
That would not work as a journeyman,
Yet could never conceive a master-plan.*

Labyrinthine

YOU are no famed artificer
To build a chamber cunningly
To trap me in, or from my hair
To make a net to capture me.

I will not give myself, nor sell,
I will be free and nothing less,
And you can't bind me with a spell
That's fashioned from my loveliness.

A poor enchanter you must be
To take my beauty for your snare ;
Why should I be entrapped by me ?
Or fettered by my limbs or hair ?

You are no skilled magician,
No Merlin, in a little while
To tame me quite, no wonder-man
To make me quiet with a smile.

You shall not string in chains my teeth
To bind me with them how you please ;
My eyes you shall not conjure with,
Nor make them charms to cloy my knees ;

Nor shall you make a magic room
And magic bed wherein we'd lie ;
Our bodies mingled in the gloom,
I should be something less than I.

You could not carve of ivory
A shackle that should hold me thus.
Oh, poor contriver, I am free—
Am free—and yet—ah, Daedalus.

In What Vale?

WHEN sleep is with the lily,
And death is on the rose,
Ah, whither speeds their perfume?
And where their beauty goes
Who knows?

When song has quit the swallow,
And laughter left the wren;
When all the laugh, the singing,
Has faded down the glen;
What then?

So, when our words are faded,
And dumb what each one saith,
Where rings the cry we uttered,
Where sighs our kissing breath
In death?

A Song of Songs

A H me ! how oft my heart is smitten
With pangs for poems never written ;
I range their titles in a row,
The songs the world will never know,
And think with anguish on the fair
Heart-sorrowings of “ Anywhere ? ”
On those sweet things “ Can these dead
bones . . . ”
“ Sent to Mrs Thomas Jones,”
“ Cupid,” “ The old Cathedral Close,”
“ A sonnet,” “ To a fading rose,”
“ Dulcinea,” “ Mary,” “ Gargamelle,”
“ Evangeline,” “ A passing bell,”
“ One Autumn Eve,” “ The fairy sheaf,”
“ To my dog Fido,” “ True Belief,”
“ Sic vos non vobis,” “ In the pines,”
“ Faith,” “ Hope,” “ Charity ” and “ Lines.”

A Friend

YOU, that sit gazing in the fire,
Have found your peace, your prime desire ;
Whatever comes, you have fulfilled
All that the depths within you willed,
Have won a peace from self's commands.
Stretched in your lap your quiet hands
Meet in consensate harmonies
Your quiet lips, your quiet eyes.

The Little Owl

(On the Upper River, Cambridge)

WE glide and are still on the river
In quiet that drugs the wit,
The sun has charmed our hearts
As the day is charmed with it ;

And the little owl in the willow—
So passionless, still, we seem—
As little fears our passing
As he fears the passing stream.

The sun has charmed our hearts,
Our sense, to tranquillity—
Quiet as weeds in the river
Or the little owl in the tree.

The Old Beggar's Song

THE mountains are little children,
But I am very old ;
The hill-sides scoff at the weather,
But I shiver in the cold.

The laugh has left my old mouth,
The glitter quit my eye,
But the young eyes of the cliff-sides
Laugh incessantly.

The rivers are but infants—
Their legs are lithe and quick,
But I am atwist and halting,
And I hobble with a stick.

The Words of the Wise

THE wise have said that each man's life,
His trifling peace, his petty strife,
Abortively or foul or pure,
Is but the world in miniature.
So, as we cry for friends that pass
To the courteous earth and the kindly grass,
Will all the neighbour worlds around
Cry with a thin and lonely sound,
And drop pale tears from filmèd eyes,
When this young world grows old and dies?

40 When you, oh, sad of heart

When you, oh, sad of heart,
are Dead

WHEN you, oh, sad of heart, are dead,
With dark earth mounded o'er your head,
The multitudinous eyes of spring
Will deck your breast, and skylarks sing
In skies as pure as eyes of yours,
“ Oh, sad of heart, we and the flowers,
We loved you, who walked earth above
Knowing no arms nor lips of love.”
Thus will they sing, nor guess at all,
Oh, sad of heart, Oh, best of all.

Failure

YOU were so elflike, lissome, slim,
Transparent almost, with a dim
Glow in your eyes as of distress
Far off, remote : a shepherdess
I tried to think you, herding dreams
Along the bends of misty streams,
Where mazy rush and willow grew . . .
Some one I craved to shrine above,
I fairly ached to be in love—
Just think, I almost fell in love with you !

Mythology Up-to-Date

“ ‘Elles sont trois . . . Comme les muses.’

‘Cher monsieur, ce sont les Graces qui sont trois. Les muses sont neuf. Vous vous trompez de déesses!’

‘Oh! les déesses! Moi, vous savez, je suis anticlerical.’ ”

“ LE ROI.”

GAZER, quit your chilly star—
I’ve found who the nine Graces are
Walking solid on the earth
In Candour, Goodliness and Mirth.
Kate, for the draping of her dress;
Nell, for her stately gentleness;
Ellen, for the way she goes
Delightedly, where the wind blows,
And struggles neatly with the breeze;
Dolly, supple as the trees

Beside the Cam ; for those sweet curves
 About her shoulders Anne deserves
 A place, as Fanny for the jet
 That is her hair ; and Margaret
 That walks with grace the beaten track ;
 Peggy, for straightness of her back ;
 And Joan, whose presence fetters me
 With her incredibility.
 These are the Deathless, the Divine,
 —And Jack has found another nine.

Hesitancy

O H heart, how long shall we serve errantry
Among the mazes of uncertain youth?
How long be hampered round with this uncouth,
Grotesque array of half-fidelity,
Half-love, half-wisdom; all the misery
Of wondering? But when shall we with smooth
And easy mind say "Look! for here is Truth,
Here Love, and here the godhead Certainty."

Shall that god come? or must we bear about
With us the torment of a sleepless wit?
Still shirk acceptance? Still desire to prove?
And even in life's best moment, paled with doubt,
Between the passion and the chill of it,
Be cursed with wonder "Is This really Love?"

Friend To Friend

SHALL we not,
 When our youth is cold and over,
 And our limbs
 Halt, and our smooth skins are rougher,
 Our sharp eyes
 Blunt with much debate of sight,
 In the hours
 After daylight, before night,
 Cry awhile for sharp and bright?

Do you think—
 Better “we,” our thought has ever
 Fallen as one—
 Think we then that any briefer

Or less sweet

Our talk shall be than once it was ?

We two old

Shall chirp together of things that pass,

Like two crickets in the grass.

Though love come

Only once, and no more follow,

Come to each—

As on a silent lake the swallow

Touches soft

The quiet water as it lies,

Then no more,

While the cloudlets pigeon-wise

Turn within the evening skies—

Shall that hurt ?

While the child is in the womb

Is there fret

Whither the grown man shall come ?

No, not so.

We'll not heed this mournful flame,
You and I.

Youth is quite a pleasant game ;
Come, forget the future's claim.

And yet, yet—

Bluster will not kill the terror.
Here's the wind

Blowing gusts. Is it a mirror
Of our lives ?

See this gust come at a run,
Stormily,
Bending trees, a mighty one,
Then seem to fail, its work undone.

Such our lives ?

Roar at first, then fade away ?
But we're young ;
Though we know we cannot slay

This great doubt,

Yet, this one day undismayed,

Let's reject

The brittle things of which we're made—

Let's forget we are afraid.

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